

**SCARBORO UNITED CHURCH**

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2010**

**SERMON PREACHED BY**

**THE REV. JAN CRAIG**

**“CALLED TO DO WHAT?”**

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Yes “I’ve Been Called”

“Here I am Lord. Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.”

Personal testimonies by: Hatti Boothman and  
Mike Meloney

“If I have been called to **do**, then I think I must have missed the clues; but I do know I have been called to **be**. To be what?

This required examination of my life, and then I saw the clues which I had disregarded.

I was called to be a friend, to embrace what is in front of me.

The first clue was as a young child I would go out the lane then down the road to visit Nellie, Hiram Lindsay’s house keeper. Nellie would feed me cookies and tell me stories of her life. I expect it was the cookies that drew me to her. I would take her flowers from our garden. She sewed me a dress. This relationship grew and went on for several years. When Nellie was in a nursing home the only way they could get her to eat was to say: “Hattie brought this for you.”

Second clue: Last spring while I was in Agassiz BC, I went to the United Church and met Phyllis. She didn’t say come and see me sometime, but asked if I could come for tea next Wednesday at 3 pm?

We had many cups of tea and her fresh-baked muffins while sitting at her kitchen table chatting and watching the birds come to the feeders just outside the windows. Sometimes there was the two of us or one or two of her many friends. I learned from her acceptance, generosity and joy of living.

When it came time to leave Agassiz I thought I’m going to have to find another Phyllis or better still, be a “Phyllis”.

For someone who has spent most of her life being a loner, this is a challenge. Being a friend takes many forms.

Third clue: I was walking alone one day along one of the many city paths when I noticed a young man was walking toward me. I said: “Good Morning.” We were almost past one another when he said: “Good morning. Thank you.” I will probably never see him again, but that gesture meant something to him and maybe he was able to pass it on. I felt that my world was larger or maybe it was my heart.

It takes time and energy to be a friend, but the rewards are limitless.

All of the things I aspire to be come under the umbrella of love.”

Hatti Boothman,  
Scarboro United Church

“I started my United Church journey in a weekly AA meeting in the basement of Trinity United, in Inglewood in 1976. After five years of invitations to come upstairs on Sunday, I did just that.

During this period, Joyce and I met, courted and ultimately were married at Trinity United during the Easter Sunday Service. Everyone attended our reception!

On one occasion, when asked to speak to the congregation about my personal “call” to the faith, I explained to them that God’s grace, Alcoholics Anonymous and Trinity Industries (in that order ) were responsible for me getting my life back.

Trinity Industries was a combination of halfway house and a program to re-introduce unemployable alcoholics into the work force. It was started and nurtured by Trinity United Church until it grew big enough for the provincial government to recognize the program’s value and to make it their own. Perhaps it had been a while since they were reminded of the incredible good they had fostered, so they were humble and grateful to be reminded.

Joyce and I have belonged to two United Church congregations during the years between Trinity and Scarboro. In one church we were involved almost to the point of burn-out. You all know what that’s about.

We left the last church we attended for a number of reasons, mostly having to do with my difficulty driving at night making it nearly impossible to be very involved. The final straw, though, was because financial worries led them to change their minds about moving forward in faith with their youth program. I am overjoyed to hear they have since changed direction.

And now we are here. Most of you know the wonderful achievements of Scarboro, past and present. I am too new to be very familiar with those.

What I do know, is that incredibly exciting, invigorating change is at our door. It is called “Emerging Spirit”. I am called to be part of something new and great. It will happen.....don’t you feel it??

We just have to throw open the doors; welcome change; embrace it; and get busy keeping Scarboro United the great church Calgary and the world needs us to be!”

Mike Maloney  
Scarboro United Church

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## “CALLED TO DO WHAT?”

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 1: 4-10  
Luke 4: 21-30

The story of Jeremiah begins with a call from God. Our service today has included reflections on call - from the youth sharing about their time at the Salvation Army with those who seek food and shelter and comfort there - to the life reflections offered us by Hattie and Mike. God is present in our lives and finds countless ways to communicate with us, nudging us in directions and into places and toward becoming something that we might not otherwise have been.

A call may well be hard to define. I read somewhere this week that it is rather like the “call of the sea” - or perhaps the “call of the mountains” -- it is that unexplainable, unavoidable, inexplicable, irresistible sense of purpose and destiny that is so closely linked to our very being that we cannot be separated from it. It is an expression of who we are at our very core and speaks to that.

It can be about what we do in life, how we live, who we share life with, how we spend our days ... it is about our very being.

A poet has written these words:

Sometime when the river is ice  
Ask me mistakes I have made;  
Ask me whether what I have done  
Is my life.

I found that quote in a book by Parker Palmer who is an author I really like and through his books has been a mentor to me. He is a Quaker and writes a great deal about call. In his book Let Your Life Speak he writes about going to teach a course at another college on teaching. As he was preparing and getting set up, one of the hosts warned him about one of the participants. This particular professor comes to everything, he was told, but then argues and puts down every guest. So Parker Palmer was prepared. As the workshop began Palmer asked the teachers to tell the group about a mentor they had had who had taught them how to teach. As you can imagine, several moving stories were told. After a few stories this particularly difficult professor began to speak -- but not like he usually did. His voice was full of sadness and regret as he confessed that for 20 years he had been trying to mimic his mentor's teaching style unsuccessfully. After all these years he just now realized that what he was doing was not his life. Ask me whether what I have done is my life.

God's call to us is to live our lives fully - to be fully who we are meant to be. That may be expressed in many ways or in a particular way. We listen for God's voice (inside us, from family and friends, in reading, as we walk) and we seek to follow that voice and that is where we find fullness of life. And when we find fullness of life for ourselves we find fullness of life for others. For we cannot have it for ourselves if we do not enable others also to find it. That is God's way.

Calls from God have three participants: you or me, God and the community.

Calls are meant to be tested. They are not just desires or longings or neat things to do. Calls are always meant to be tested within the community to know whether others are also aware of that call and can affirm it.

From his call we know that God knew Jeremiah. God knew Jeremiah from before he was born. What a beautiful passage and what beautiful imagery for all of us to hear ... Don, Catherine, Hattie, Joyce, Donelda, Liz, Diana, Jenny, Bill, Clay ... "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you"..... Graham, Bob, Kay. Wendy I appoint you to ... "do not be afraid." (All your names are in there. Every one of you.)

The people of that time needed Jeremiah - they were in trouble - life was not going well. Their leaders were going to disappear into captivity in a foreign land and they would not know how to worship God then. They did not know how to worship outside of Jerusalem, but they were going to need to know. They did not like what Jeremiah told them and they did not always listen, but that is a story for another time. But they needed him. Jeremiah kept on testing his call. He kept checking to see whether God was still calling and whether the community was still affirming his ministry. He did not want to be the one to tell them those things. He did not want to hear God's call. He did not think he was good enough or old enough or wise enough. At another time he might have thought he was too good or too old or knew too much. But God knew that he was the right person and God persisted. That is the thing with a call --- it does not go away. It often keeps niggling and nudging and nagging at us and it is hard to ignore.

Calls are not just personal either. Calls are corporate too. As a congregation you experience calls to ministry. You struggle together to hear and to test those calls in just the same ways as you struggle individually. As a congregation you have been called at times to do things you may not have felt up to or things you did not want to do. You have been called to be prophetic and to speak God's word of daring hope when you felt too young ... or too old.

... by becoming an affirming congregation and welcoming people of great diversity and those who are lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual;

... by continuing to be diverse and challenging yourself to be open in new ways asking "Who is on the edges now of our community?" "Who lives on the fringes and might find it hard to walk through these doors today?";

..by hosting the march on Feb 14 for missing women.

You are giving voice to a call for a Scarboro Arts Centre. Your choir is just wonderful - and the jazz group amazing. And certainly there are some other groups here throughout the week making good use of the beautiful facilities you have created here. But as you move toward renovation and rebuilding, are you listening and testing that call to a ministry of arts? How will other arts be expressed in your worship life and congregational life together? Are those voices within your midst now and are they being listened to? How will the arts emerge from your midst in new and powerful ways if that is your call? How will it shape and form and express your faith and your experience of God? What gifts and skills will you seek in your new ministry staff to help you express and experience this call you have experienced? How will this call enhance the life of this congregation and the community which surrounds it?

This call is impacting your dreams for rebuilding or renovating - it is a powerful call ... with great impact. Are you still listening for God's voice? Where is God taking your ministry in this area? Where else is God calling for ministry that impacts your building dreams? Are you listening?

A genuine response to a call usually brings new life to God's people and the people around them - it does not mean it is easy however - or that it goes smoothly. Just look at Jesus.

God sent Jesus to Nazareth - and yes we know the reception he got. No prophet is welcome in his home town, yet all prophets start there. God sent Jeremiah. Jesus sends the church. No negotiation. Scarboro's congregation is sent to this particular area of Calgary.

You have served here for 80 lively and strong, life and faith filled years.

I believe you have no option but to listen for God's call about the ministry that you are called to here and to test that ministry with the community inside and outside these walls. It is not just your ministry. It is God's ministry and you are God's people.

This is our common calling right now. We can't ignore it or turn from it. We can try to ignore our call or to turn from it but we won't succeed. We serve God -- and God won't let us. We are a people of God with work to do and a word of love and care to speak. We are neither too young nor too old to respond. God calls regardless of age and stage.

And so I challenge each of us today to begin to listen and to pray more intentionally ... pray and listen for God's voice in our own lives. Who is God calling us to be? Who is the you that God believes you are and longs for you to be? Who is God calling Scarboro to be? Who is the congregation that God believes Scarboro is and longs for this church to be?

Your Annual Meeting is coming up and this is a time to be thinking and praying about who you are and who God longs for you to be.

Whenever God calls, God's people to go and serve, God promises, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you ... Do not be afraid ... for I am with you ."

Amen